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ABSTRACT

In recent years, many policy makers, including officials in the Federal Government and the National Governors' Association, have advocated public school choice as the answer to the problems of public education. In 1987, Minnesota was the first state to pass legislation implementing a statewide, interdistrict, open enrollment plan for public schools. Today more than 20 states have either passed choice legislation or are considering such action. This Research Digest summarizes the findings of "Open Enrollment Study: Student and District Participation 1989-90," a working paper prepared by the Minnesota House of Representatives Research Department that assesses the early results of the Minnesota open enrollment program. Findings show that student enrollment in Minnesota has been very limited. In 1989-90, less than .5 percent of the total Minnesota K-12 student population participated in open enrollment, although 96 percent of the state's student population lived in participating districts. Only 20 percent of students citing a reason for transferring under open enrollment mentioned academic opportunity or a specific academic program. Over 40 percent of the reasons given were related to convenience or geographic proximity factors. Most schools have not experienced a significant enrollment change. Of the 343 participating districts, 75 percent experienced less than a 1 percent change in total enrollment because of the open enrollment program. Only 12 districts experienced an enrollment change of more than 50 students. Open enrollment has potential as a tool for influencing district policies and decisions, as may be seen in a situation that developed in the Mountain Iron-Buhl School District. (Four references) (MLH)

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